

# Poe's Place in Southern Criticism

by Cora Emmett Dolbee

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## POE'S PLACE in SOUTHERN CRITICISM.

In America where all things are comparatively new there was no literature in the strict sense of the word until the nineteenth century. But almost hand in hand with the growth of literature was the growth of criticism. Usually there must be considerable literature in a country before it wins the notice of critics. America, however, claimed not only the language of Mother England but the culture as well as her inheritances. Consequently criticism, though it could not well anticipate creation, developed along with it from the very first. In the North Longfellow began by writing critical essays upon European literature; in them was a strong element of didacticism, for he intended them for the instruction of the public. He was always courteous, however, and made his works attractive by their very mildness. But while Longfellow was seeking in a kindly way to instruct the ignorant Northerners, Poe was ruthlessly trying to "wipe out of existence" the ignorant Southerners who ventured to approach the field of literature. Yet between these two venturers, the gentle Longfellow and the bold Poe, was a long varying line of critics — among them Ripley and Margaret Fuller — down to Lowell, who was the first to combine the better qualities of these two pioneers in pointing out the best in writers and things written and at the same time giving them their right relative rank. Nevertheless to the greater part of American critical writing up to the present

day even, some one has seen fit to apply the term "pioneer toils". And to one division of the most pioneer of those "pioneer toils" and to the leading figure in them is this discussion to be devoted.

p. 46. Before 1834 there seems to have been little if any criticism in Southern literature. There was little literature itself in the South in the early days. Many books were written but few were good. "For lack of healthy criticism", says S.A.Link in his Pioneers of Southern Literature, "a great deal of trash - bombastic extravaganza - has been offered the South in the name of literature". In a division of the country then that had no criticism of its own, and was apparently unaffected by other people's criticism of literature, it is interesting to note the crude beginnings and their development into an accomplished art.

In the literature of the first quarter of the century and earlier criticism seems to have been entirely unknown. In the works of that period now extant and accessible there is no trace of it. Nor from the thought and form of the work is there any evidence that the authors were at all aware of what was going on in the field of criticism elsewhere in the world. In the year 1834, however, writers began to comment upon each other and each other's work. The year which marks the birth of the Southern Literary Messenger marks, too, in a way the birth of criticism in Southern literature. In the first issue of the monthly there were

some discriminating book notices. At the close were some Editorial Remarks to and about contributors and contributions. These remarks were kept up until about the end of the first volume. The editor, James E. Heath by name, made an unjust attack upon Fairy Tales; afterwards, however, some were admitted to <sup>the</sup> publication. The third number contained a friendly review of Thomas Semmes' Poems by a Collegian. Notice was given of a volume of poems, and there was an editorial on the objects of the Messenger.

southern  
Literary  
Messenger,  
pp.17-19.

The editorials themselves soon became more or less critical. In the first issues, however, the criticism consisted chiefly of book reviews and fragmentary personal comments. An editorial in the fifth number, 1835, says: "The Last Days of Pompeii has raised Mr. Bulwer fifty per cent in our estimation." The book is then compared to Summer L. Fairfield's Last Night of Pompeii, and "the author of Pelham is severely excoriated as a sophist in ethics, a libertine in love, a smuggler and plagiarist".

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The writer of the editorial has begun to realize the value of comparison. His points are not well worked out. Apparently the similarity in title is all that has drawn the second work into consideration. The characterization, however, of the author of Pelham when he is "severely excoriated as a sophist in ethics, a libertine in love, a smuggler and plagiarist" is the work of only a thoughtful, discriminating mind. The spirit of the impressionistic critic is there in

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the bud. Another outburst is given in calling the title of Zarry Zyle's work, A Song of the Seasons, a quaint cognomen. Note is made, too, of the fact that the poem had been pitched into for its obscurity and other faults by a correspondent of Shepherdstown, Virginia, a place near which Zarry lived. In wondering whether it was right to admit the tale, The Doom, the editor says he had to expurgate it of "certain profane and unchaste allusions".

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Southern  
Writers,  
p.105.

Another work of this period, David Crockett's Autobiography published in 1834, is, in part, of a slightly critical nature. In writing Concerning His Book, he says he doesn't know "anything in his book to be criticised on by honorable men". Spelling is not his trade; Grammar he had not time to learn; never having written a book before he knows nothing of arrangement. "Will it be on the authorship of the book?—this I claim and I'll hang on to it, like a wax plaster.----- Big men have more important matters to attend to than crossing their t's, - and dotting their i's -, and such like small things."

With the exception of this selection by Davy Crockett which needs no further comment than merely to say that did it come in any other period it would not be considered criticism at all, - with this exception practically everything that had been done in Southern literature in the field of criticism had found the public through the medium of the Southern Literary Messenger. We have seen how meager and

fragmentary it was. At most there was little of it; at best what there was was poor. Like the Messenger itself it was all an experiment, uncertain always of what it should consist, uncertain of what its mission was. While the magazine with its subject matter was still in this condition a new figure now sought it as a medium through which to give his works to the public, a figure whose name was destined to stand eventually at the very head of Southern men of letters, a figure whose name was Edgar Allan Poe.

It was in 1835 in the seventh number of the second volume of the Southern Literary Messenger with the publication of Berenice that the name of Poe, <sup>both</sup> ~~at once~~ short story writer and critic, was first introduced to the South. And thereafter for a period of some fifteen years that name was to be associated actively with all the literary criticism of the South, and through all years to wield an influence over all American literature.

At first it was through the comments his work received that Poe was connected with criticism. Of Berenice the editor said: "He discovers a superior capacity and a highly cultivated taste in composition". Poe himself said: "I have a tale to tell in its own essence, rife with horror". In the eighth number appeared another of Poe's tales, Morella, of which the editor wrote: "Morella will unquestionably prove that Mr. Poe has great powers of imagination and a command of language seldom surpassed. Yet we cannot but lament that he has drunk so deep

Southern  
Literary  
Messenger,  
p. 26.

p.27. at some enchanted fountain, which seems to blend in his fancy the shadows of the tomb with the clouds and sunshine of life. We doubt, however, if anything in the name of style can be cited, which contains more terrific beauty than this tale!" In a review of this same issue, too, we find the critical notices have "some internal evidence that Mr. Poe may have had a hand in them!"

Thus it is that the name of Poe is first connected with literary criticism of the South. Almost as soon as he appeared as a story writer he began to do critical work, too. When he entered the field he found it almost barren; when he left it, he had made it rich with the fruits of his own labors. From the very beginning his works attracted attention. The range and worth of the notice he was receiving is indicated in the comment upon A Tale, Bon-Bon in the twelfth issue.

p.33. "When such men as Miller, Latrobe, Kennedy, Tucker and Paulding speak unanimously in terms of exalted commendation of any literary production, it is nearly unnecessary to say that we are willing to abide by their decision."

p.35. Poe was rapidly winning a place for himself among men of letters of the South. In December, 1836, in the first number of the second volume the editor singles out the name of Poe because other journals "sing praises of his uniquely original vein of imagination and of humorous, delicate satire".

Poe was the assistant editor, and soon proclaimed as editor. In this position he began a kind of criticism which was



p.36. practically new to Southern literature, and not old to any literature. In a review of Norman Leslie, a Tale of the Present Times, the author was spoken of as, "nobody but Theodore S. Fay, one of the editors of the New York Mirror. His style is unworthy of a schoolboy. He has either never seen an edition of Murray's Grammar or he has been a-Willising so long as to have forgotten his vernacular language!" Then after noting his use of "a blistering detail", "a blistering truth", "a blistering story", and "a blistering hand", Poe added, "But we have done with Norman Leslie. If ever we saw such a silly thing may we be blistered."

This is the first example of that impressionistic type of criticism which soon became very characteristic of Poe. Without hesitation he said what he felt. He apparently had no respect for other people's feelings. The effect of what he did concerned him little. Even thus early we find him noting bad qualities first, and denouncing them heartlessly. Things that displeased seemed to excite him most, and in a fit of excitement he wrote his review. As an idea appealed to him would he tell about it; always the personal element in his comments was strong. Here the concluding sentence, "If ever we saw such a silly thing may we be blistered", takes us at once into the realm of the author's own impassioned feelings. Its effect upon him is the thing of the moment. In number three he went still further in writing of Morris Mattson's Paul Ulric.

"When we called Norman Leslie the silliest book in the

p.39. world, we had certainly never seen Paul Ulric. Of Mr. Mattson's style the less we say the better. It is quite good enough for Mr. Mattson's matter". The first comment had been pointed but it was blunt in comparison with this. A single sentence of either was enough to wilt the thing it dealt with completely. Yet Poe reviewed this "silly book" with extracts in seven pages, while to an unpretending Virginia tale of two hundred pages he gave but a single line. In the succeeding issues were many critical notes, some of commendation, some of condemnation, upon English and American magazines, and upon separate works- all given in Poe's characteristic frank way.

It is sometimes said of people that they are doing something worth while, when their work calls forth public criticism. If we should apply this idea as a measuring rod to Poe's work now we should find it all "worth while". As frequent as his own critical notes almost, came criticisms of his own work. Unconsciously in commenting upon Poe these people frequently imitated his style. In the fifth number of the Southern Literary Messenger Poe found it necessary to defend himself against W.G. Clark, Colonel Stone and the New York Mirror. Stone had said that most of Poe's critiques had been "flippant, unjust, untenable and uncritical".

p.42. About this same time in an article on the Messenger the Richmond Compiler said: "Poe is a man of brilliant genius and endowments; sometimes, however, he manifests errors of judg-



p.43-4.

ment or faults in taste. Duc de L'Omelette ought not to have appeared. "Mr. Poe is too fond of the wild, unnatural, horrible. Why will he not permit his fine genius to soar into purer, brighter and happier regions? ----- When he passes from the regions of shadows into the plain, practical dissecting room of criticism, he manifests great dexterity and power. He exposes the imbecility and rottenness of our ad captandum popular literature with the hand of a master."

The man who wrote this was possessed himself of no mean judgment. Poe was applying a laboratory method to the various works that came within his notice and consigning the worthless to the waste-basket. Though he may have been a harsh critic, he was doing a good work for Southern literature.

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In August Poe had again to make a defense, but this time of the Messenger rather than of self. The Courier and Daily Compiler had said: "The criticisms are pithy and often highly judicious, but the editors must remember that it is almost as injudicious to obtain a character for regular cutting and slashing as for indiscriminate laudation." In response Poe summarized the work he had done. Since December he had reviewed ninety-four books. In the seventy-nine cases commendation largely predominated; in seventeen cases, censure. Only three reviews, however were harshly and decidedly condemnatory, Norman Leslie, Paul Ulric, and Ups and Downs. The last alone was exceptionally condemned. The Courier and Daily Compiler then rejoined with, "It is not probable we shall ever again

p.53-6.

disturb, even by a hint, the current of laudation, having had another confirmation of the truth, that giving advice, even with the best of motives, is rather an unthankful business."

But Poe was not all the while responding to comments upon his own work. Up to the time of his retirement in 1838, he continued to talk frankly upon various books, both briefly and at length. In the September number are ten pages of reviews without any harshness. In October, however, he called the Swiss Heiress the most solemn of farces. After advising that it be read by all that had nothing better to do, he added, "However it is a valuable 'work' and now in the name of fate foreknowledge and free-will, we solemnly consign it to the fire." Perhaps the work did seem the most solemn of farces, but was not that saying enough about it? Enough for the average critic, mayhap, but not for Poe. The author was but another worthless creature that was to be got out of the way; if the business had to be done at all it might as well be done well. Just exactly what he means by each of the terms, fate, foreknowledge and free-will, is not very evident, but the combination lends force to the consignment and heat to the fiery destiny.

It was Poe, the most independent of critics, that spoke here as it was again in 1844 when as contributor he offered the Literary Life of Thingum Bob for the December issue.

The same spirit was back of the "The Editor of the Goose-

p.139.

rumfoodle, too. Again in April, 1845, announcement was made of Poe's further connection with the Messenger, but nothing more ever came of the plan. "Mr. Poe was to contribute monthly a critique raisonne of the most important forthcoming works in this country and in Europe." In 1848 Poe did review the poems of Mrs. S. Anna Lewis, and discuss in two articles the Rationale of Verse. He became acquainted with the new editor, John R. Thompson, and was soon again a regular contributor, furnishing five papers of the Marginalia and a review of the poems of Frances S. Osgood. Shortly after this Poe died.

Poe's critical work in the Southern Literary Messenger has been reviewed at length, because early criticism of the South and much of Poe's own work is very closely bound up with this publication. In it appeared Poe's first critical work. All of his early attempts were but fragmentary. All were of an impressionistic nature, and in a measure analytic as far as they went. In that last statement I do not want to be misunderstood. All of Poe's critical work- even his theorizing, seems impressionistic. His own personal feelings colored all his ideas to such an extent that they cannot be separated. We cannot read any of the comments without being aware of the personality that prompted them. The two are often inseparable but in the case of Poe more so I think than in any other critical author I have read. But much of Poe's work is at once impressionistic and analytic. Being unable to eliminate the personal quality at any time he lets the tone run through

what he would analyze. Often in his early fragmentary works he would give or imply a reason for his impression. The reasoning would often be well worked out. Sometimes for a considerable space the comments would be purely objective, but always before the subject was dropped the critic would express himself subjectively upon the question.

For instance he criticised Cooper for wordiness and circumlocution. His comments upon Wyandotte are on the whole impressionistic; the first are of a general nature, and the last more detailed. In criticising Cooper's style he speaks of the awkwardness of, "I was a favorite, I believe, with, certainly was much petted by both". Further he says Cooper's sentences are grammatically incorrect; his antecedents are not clear; his work as a whole is incoherent because of the awkward use of words, wrong understanding of their meanings and inaccurate statements. But Poe was not content with pointing out merely faults of awkwardness. In inaccuracies he saw the absurd and had to tell about it humorously at the expense, of course, of the author. Cooper portrayed a character that never did "a particle more than the exertion and the strength that were absolutely necessary to effect his object". Poe added in comment then, "Did Mr. Cooper ever hear of any labor that required more exertion than was necessary?"

Again of Miss Barrett's Drama of Exile he gave a short but very creditable criticism. She had no examples of sustained effort. Her wild and magnificent genius contented it-

On Novels,  
Essays and  
Travels,  
p.II.

self with points - with flashes. Lady Geraldine is her only  
Poe's Lit- poem that is not deficient as an artistical whole. "Her  
erary Crit- genius is too impetuous for the minute technicalities of that  
icism, V. elaborate art so needful in the building up of pyramids of  
VIII, p.297. immortality." To be sure Poe's judgment may not always be  
accurate. Coming from a mind ever open to impression, his  
work even when analytic can be regarded only as impression.  
But already in this earlier period Poe thought deeply about  
what he wrote. Though guided by feeling, he listened to  
reason enough always to keep the interest and usually the  
respect of his readers. One feels as one reads that Poe is  
an artist who knows, who understands, but who does not take  
time to make the reader see as he does. Such a feeling do we  
have for his comparison of Tennyson and Mrs. Browning.

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p.319.

"With Tennyson's works beside her, and a keen apprecia-  
tion of them in her soul - appreciation too keen to be dis-  
criminative; with an imagination even more vigorous than his,  
although somewhat less ethereally delicate; with inferior  
art and more feeble volition; she has written poems such as  
he could not write, but such as he, under her conditions of  
ill-health and seclusion, would have written <sup>during</sup> the epoch  
of his pupildom in that school which rose out of Shelley, and  
from which over a disgustful gulf of utter incongruity and  
absurdity lit only by miasmatic flashes, into the broad open  
meadows of Natural Art and Divine Genius, he - Tennyson - is  
at once the bridge and the transition."

Our first impression of the passage is that it is itself a bit literature. The thought of the sentence is very compact; yet the style is so smooth that we are carried away by the charm of it all. Nor is the idea itself hard to grasp. But in reviewing the passage we find it a little difficult to appreciate the worth of the idea. Earlier we have said that after Poe states his impressions he usually proceeds to substantiate them. Occasionally, however, he fails to do this, and this is one of the times. Completely saturated with his own feeling for the poets Poe did see the need of showing his readers upon what that feeling was based. In shorter passages, in conceptions more shallow, he does take time for analysis. But in such a passage as this his enthusiastic appreciation could not but be hindered by an interloping of reason and fact in the imaginative flight. Where analysis would aid the art of impressionism he resorted to it; where it would hinder he omitted it altogether.

Vol.VI,            In his Introduction to the Literary Criticism of Poe,  
pp.XI-XXVI. E.C.Stedman says that Poe's chosen field was that of the re-  
viewer; he looked upon the reform and advancement of criticism in America as a special charge. His excursions in the field are of two kinds, specific and abstract. The specific have already been treated in some detail. His temperament inclined him to the minute analysis of defects, but he could also praise. At the outset he gained more repute by a sharp review of an over-puffed Knickerbocker novelist than by some



of his most striking tales. "The spirit of his writing is that of what he felt himself to be, - an Apostle of Taste." But by nature a critic he did not spend all of his time upon the specific. One of so original and various a turn of mind could not well help having some theories to advance. And it is for the ideas put forth in the Poetic Principle and for his conception of the Tale or Short Story that Poe has become most famous in American criticism.

The formula of the Poetic Principle he repeats twice, once in his Horne's Orion and again in the Philosophy of Composition. Though in the beginning of the Poetic Principle Poe says he does <sup>not</sup> intend what he has to say to be taken as finally thorough and profound, he nevertheless speaks in the tone of a dictator throughout. A poem, he says, deserves its title as it excites by elevating the soul. "After the lapse of half an hour at the very utmost, it flags - fails - a revulsion ensues - and then the poem is in effect, and in fact no longer such." Then, too, a poem should be written for the poem's sake, not for the teaching of a moral. "He must be theory mad beyond redemption, who in spite of these differences, shall still persist in attempting to reconcile the obstinate oils and waters of Poetry and Truth." Then Poe divides the world of mind into Pure Intellect which seeks for Truth, Taste which reaches out for the Beautiful, and Moral Sense which recognizes Duty. "Poetry is no mere appreciation of the Beauty before us, but a wild effort to reach the Beauty

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p.4.

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above." According to this theory then Poe maintains that there cannot be such a thing as a long poem, for it would be but a flat contradiction of terms. "The ultimate aggregate or absolute effect of even the best piece under the sun is nullity." The Iliad may have been intended as a series of lyrics; considered as an epic the poem is based on an imperfect sense of Art. The modern epic is an inconsiderate and blindfold imitation of the ancient model. The "day of these artistic anomalies", however, is over. The notion of sustained effort put forth in the quarterlies is absurd. A work of art should be judged by the impression it makes; the effect it produces. "Perseverance is one thing and genius quite another, and all the quarterlies in Christendom can't confound them." On the other hand a very short poem never produces a profound or an enduring effect. "There must be the steady pressing down of the stamp upon the wax." All the principles laid down here we find carried out in Poe's own poems. The Raven and Ulalume are perhaps the best examples of the effect of constant repetition. Love he held was the purest and truest poetical theme; of this idea practically every poem he wrote is an illustration.

Poe's theory of poetry alone has called forth a great deal of comment, more unfavorable probably than favorable. The theory itself has been called false, the author little short of mad; again it has been looked upon as but the whim of a whimsical mind. Critics may be right in objecting to the



theory in so far as it does away with poems like the Iliad because of their length. Those of us who come to the Iliad with the same lack of prejudice that we come to Poe's poems cannot feel that applying the term "poem" to the old Greek epic is but a flat contradiction of terms. We do feel, however, that Poe's poems gain much in totality of effect that the Iliad loses. Oneness of impression means much in any work of Art - even though it be sought for as Poe says he sought for it in working out the Raven. Personally I like the theory; I believe there is more in his idea of oneness than many have thought. One idea worked out thoroughly within a short space is worth more I believe than a number of ideas but partially worked out at greater length. To be sure some longer poems work out but one idea, but the thought loses to some extent in value always, for the author as well as the reader must apply to it more than one mood. However we look upon the theory it has nevertheless brought Poe distinction, and creditable distinction, too, in the field of American poetry. In the South at least if not in all America, it has made him stand as the first poet. Even as such to be sure he is not to be entirely praised, but where is the poet with whose work some fault cannot be found? Lowell in his Fable for Critics is not altogether wrong when he says,

"There comes Poe with his raven, like Barnaby Rudge,  
Three-fifths of him genius and two-fifths sheer fudge,  
Who talks like a book of iambs and pentameters,

In a way to make people of common-sense damn metres,  
Who has written some things quite the best of their kind  
But the heart somehow seems all squeezed out of the mind!"  
Of the Bells or even the Raven this criticism of Lowell's does  
indeed hold true, but of everything Poe wrote it does not.  
Usually as has been said Poe wrote of love, and of some passion  
ate feeling of his own experience. Out of such poems it would  
be unjust to say that the heart was all squeezed by the mind.  
The beautiful sonnett To My Mother is an expression of  
love from the very depths of the poet's own heart.

"My mother, my own mother, who died ~~early~~,  
Was but the mother of myself; but you  
Are mother to the one I loved so dearly,  
And thus are dearer than the mother I knew  
By that infinity with which my wife  
Was dearer to my soul than its soul-life."

In recognition of merely the sestet of this sonnet, it seems  
hard to see how people can say Poe's poetry is heartless.  
Some poems are, but were the best qualities of all poems com-  
bined, Poe would compare well with any poet, either European  
or American, whose works were considered in a similar way.

Poe's theory of the short story is in general plan  
similar to that of poetry. In his review of Hawthorne's  
Twice Told Tales he gives us his own conception of the tale  
without calling it a form. "The ordinary novel", he says, "is  
objectionable from its length. ----- As it cannot

In Gam- be read at one sitting, it deprives itself, of course , of  
brill's Sel-the immense force derivable from totality. ----- In the  
ection's brief tale, however, the author is enabled to carry out the  
from Poe, fulness of his intention, be it what it may. During the hour  
p.XXVI. of perusal the soul of the reader is at the writer's control.

"A skillful literary artist has constructed a tale. If  
wise he has not fashioned his thoughts to accomodate his in-  
cidents; but having conceived with deliberate care a certain  
unique or single effect to be wrought out, he then invents  
such incidents - he then combines such events as may best aid  
him in establishing this preconceived effect. If his very in-  
itial sentence tend not to the bringing out of this effect,  
then he has failed in his first step. In the whole composition  
there should be no word written, of which the tendency, dir-  
ect or indirect, is not of one pre-established design".

The tale like the poem then must be short. The tale,  
however, often has a point of superiority over the poem.  
Beauty can better be treated in the poem, but Truth is often  
the aim of the tale. Hawthorne's Tales, he then adds , "belong  
to the highest region of art - an art subservient to a genius  
of a very lofty order". Poe's own Tales should be put into  
the same class. They are on the whole similar to Hawthorne's  
in length. In working out the "unique or single effect" Poe  
claims so essential to the tale, Poe is much the more success-  
ful. Poe seems really to create incident to establish pre-  
conceived effects, whereas Hawthorne seems occasionally to draw

an effect from a preconceived incident. In Poe Beauty predominates over Truth; in Hawthorne, Truth over Beauty. Yet in a measure both writers put into their tales what Poe says belongs there. Poe is said himself to have applied his theory to his own works perfectly.

This idea that a unit in literature if it be a work of art must be short is peculiar to Poe, though not original with him. The idea of the necessity of unity or totality of interest - of brevity he got from Schlegel. It distinguishes him, nevertheless, from all other writers in American literature. As an advocate of this theory, too, it is that Poe is usually known as a critic. He advanced other peculiar beliefs but none that brought him such creditable fame as this. Of some of them we shall speak in reviewing the criticism Poe's own critical works called forth.

From the time Poe's work first appeared, it demanded the attention of the public. His first literary work published in the Southern Literary Messenger called forth a comment from the editor. Sometimes the editor wrote in a personal, sometimes in a half-critical way. Of the second volume Poe himself was proclaimed as editor. Earlier in this discussion we have noted the general nature of his own comments. We have also heeded in a way the remarks his works called forth. With the publication of the January number of the third volume in 1837 Poe withdrew from the Messenger. In the sixth number of the sixth volume 1840c the magazine gave express-

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ion to its appreciation of Poe as a critic. Poe had just become a member of the editorial management of the Gentleman's magazine. "We wish," said the Messenger, "that Mr. Poe would stick to the department of criticism; there he is an able professor and he uses up the vermin who are continually crawling, unbidden, into the literary arena, with the skill and nonchalance of a protracted surgeon. He cuts them up by piecemeal and rids the republic of letters of such nuisances, just as a good officer of police sentences to their proper destination the night-strollers and vagabonds who infest our cities. We sincerely wish Mr. Poe well and hope that he will take our advice in good part."

p.169.

This was one contemporary opinion of Poe that was appreciative. Another is that of John R. Thompson, editor of the Messenger, who in 1849 upon Poe's death wrote an account which while appreciative is not unlike Poe's own in style. In publishing Poe's review of Headley and Channing, Mr. Thompson says he takes the sketches as good specimens of that tomahawk style, of which the author was a great master.

But as soon as Poe had ceased to edit the Southern Literary Messenger, the critical notes had diminished. Contributions to that department were few. What was there was more like the modern book review than pure criticism. The articles were not analytic or impressionistic. After a few years the editors failed to publish any criticism at all. Thus it seems that in Poe's own day criticism was utterly dependent upon him. He

had either to furnish it or himself to be the subject for it. That which he did himself was by far the better. Successive generations have recognized the importance of his work far more than did his own.

Literary                His literary views, says Mr. Stedman, were usually sound, Criticism, being derived from his own perceptions and his sympathetic Vol. VI,                reading of Coleridge. "His equipment, however, was inclusive pp. XI-XXVI. rather than thorough and made up of what he absorbed by the way. He had a judicial mind but was rarely in a judicial state of mind." Therefore his judgments were extravagant in either direction. He usually dealt with small subjects and seldom had time to treat of larger ones adequately. Later Mr. Stedman says: "Poe's critical bearing is scarcely that of good breeding and conciliation; it exhibits impatience, arrogance and disdain and is sometimes as brutal and long drawn as that of the Scotch reviewers whom he censures." Much of Poe's outgiving exhibited an honest purpose, a bent toward correct taste, in an unsympathetic time. With an artist's instinct Poe looked across the Atlantic and to the continent. His criticism was that of a free lance of superior quality. Of the best writers he put on record a fine appreciation. Passing over their weak points he delighted extravagantly but honestly in their creative powers. A pioneer in journalism he often did the ordinary work of a newspaper reviewer. His defects belong to hasty and often inconsistent journalism. Yet his writings exercised a helpful iconoclasm. "By their



pervading insouciance and their treatment on the same plane of both great and small , they helped to break up unserviceable traditions somewhat." He was too sensitive and too prejudiced for a very good critic. Yet "when his insight has to do with the essence of a thing - with what it is Art's function to express we must credit him with high critical power".

pp.269-271.

In his life of Poe George Edward Woodberry says the excellence of Poe's criticism cannot in itself be doubted or questioned, but "destructive criticism of imaginative work, especially, is ordinarily futile, and in Poe's case no exception need be made. The good he did was infinitesimal; it would have been far better to leave such work to the scythe of Time. -----It was merely the knowledge of the qualities and methods of artistic effect, which came to him in the development of his own genius under the controlling influence of Coleridge's reason and imagination. His criticism is thus largely a series of illustrations of literary art as he himself practiced it." Nevertheless though he originated no criterion, he was the first to take criticism from mere advertising, puffery and friendship, and submit it to the laws of literary art. Though he was prejudiced and partial and at times even foolish, this was regarded during his lifetime as his great distinction, and with all allowances made is still regarded so today.

pp.402-9.

In his American Literature C.F.Richardson says that to read the list of names of the authors Poe commented upon is

to walk through a forlorn and neglected grave yard; but it was not all Poe's fault; "the poor man certainly raked and scraped the field of American literature with sufficient assiduity". The value of the criticism of course varied with the value of the 'literature' reviewed. Poe nevertheless cleared the heated and unwholesome atmosphere which overhung our literature. In his essays, too, though in theorizing he sometimes wandered astray, he benefited American literature by the nature of the subjects he chose for critical discussion, and by the general method which he pursued.

In writing of Poe Mr. Montrose J. Moses in his recent book, the Literature of the South, says it just happened that Poe was born on American soil; "only his minor work touches American life. If we set out to draw an American portrait of him, we must concentrate our attention upon him as a critic!" But as a critic he may be called an American pioneer. At once as a critic he began that assertive independence which made his views potent, and won for himself enemies among his contemporaries, whom he fearlessly considered. He soon developed wonderful powers of analysis and synthesis; "his mind was essentially speculative, and granting that speculation possible it was thoroughly logical as far as it went". "He wrote too reportorially to be a critic of weight, yet his judgment was intuitively correct and his critical knowledge played upon American books and American authors." "A strong vein of contemporaneousness will be detected in the rationale side of his

p.291,

p.290.

p.284.

p.286.



poetic theory and in his critical boldness and verity. Yet Poe's "constructive <sup>h</sup> theories were not innately born of sound convictions; they were more properly dependent for their growth upon his aggravations."

This last point in Mr. Moses' criticism is not in keeping with our general idea of Poe. Poe was convinced of the right of what he did. So far as was possible for him his convictions were sound. He believed sincerely in his ideas. With Mr. Moses we do agree, however, in saying Poe as a critic is thoroughly American.

Pioneers of Poe's lasting benefit to American literature, according Southern to S.A.Link, "was that he lifted literary criticism above the Literature, plane of paltry praise and petty fault-finding, and gave it Vol.I,p.39. position and principles." Nothing like Poe's application of principles to friend and foe alike had been known in America before. "Poe was the true pioneer in literary criticism on this side of the water."

After our review of the growth of literary criticism in the South Mr. Link's ranking of Poe as a true pioneer in literary criticism on this side of the water, especially in the South, seems more accurate, probably, than he himself thought. With Poe really began the first criticism that is worthy of the name. His influence upon his contemporaries was to arouse them to imitate him in a measure. Yet none were so successful as he. Nor have there been <sup>e</sup> any successors whose work has attained the height of his.

Probably the greatest critic of the South in the last half of the nineteenth century was Sidney Lanier. Born in 1842, he was but seven years old when Poe died. Yet Lanier as a critic was in a way influenced by Poe. Not so much in principle as in <sup>the</sup> courage and conviction with which he worked <sup>out</sup> theories of his own was it that he resembled Poe. Just as it is hard not to associate the idea of brevity and oneness of effect with Poe, the poet, so is it difficult not to associate the idea of the close relation of music and poetry with Lanier, the poet. We have already studied Poe's theory of poetry in some detail. Now let us look at Lanier's. Of Lanier it has been said, "To him as a child in his cradle Music was given: the heavenly gift to feel and to express himself in tones." For years he played in the Peabody Symphony Orchestra of Baltimore with distinction. W.H.Ward in his Memorials says the theoretical relation between music and poetry would hardly have attracted his study had it not been that his mind was as truly philosophically and scientifically accurate as it was poetically sensuous and imaginative. Believing that the poetic art was suffering in all directions from the shameful circumstance that criticism was without a scientific basis for even the most elementary of its judgments, he accordingly worked out some laws of poetical construction.

In the Science of English Verse he discusses rythm and tone - color in verse. The rythm he regarded as the "marking of definite time measurements, which could be indicated

by bars in musical notation, having their regular time and their regular number of notes, with their proper accent". Under 'tone-color' he treats very suggestively of rhyme, alliteration and vowel and consonant distribution, showing how the recurrence of euphonic vowels and consonants secures that rich variety of tone-color which music gives in orchestration. The book is regarded as the most complete and thorough original investigation of the formal element of poetry in existence, and for it Lanier is famous. The theory he has worked out in many of his later poems. The Song of the Chattahoochee is a good example, being said to deserve a place beside Tennyson's Brook, for it strikes a higher key and is scarcely less musical. Across the water Lanier had contemporaries whose work he resembled in a great measure musically, but of whom he was in no sense an imitator. As originator of his theory he has made a place for himself as the greatest Southern critic of the last half of the nineteenth century.

Though Lanier's theory is equally well worked out with Poe's it has given him a rank not equal with but second to Poe's as Southern critic. The very nature of Lanier's makes his narrower in interest, and effect, and the position of the respective critics is accordingly affected.

Though the Science of English Verse is as a whole suggestive of Poe, there is in it no direct reference to the earlier poet and critic. In the method rather than the subject-matter lies the resemblance. But in some of Lanier's critical

comments the method is even more suggestive of the impressionism of Poe. Of Whitman he says:

P.XXXVIII. "Whitman is poetry's butcher. Huge raw collops slashed from the rump of poetry, and never mind gristle - is what Whitman feeds our souls with."

"As near as I can make out, Whitman's argument seems to be that, because a prairie is wide, therefore debauchery is admirable, and because the Mississippi is long, therefore every American is God."

The bold choice of words and the harsh tone of the first passage are in the very style of Poe himself. In fact did we not know Lanier uttered the remark, we should call it Poe's own own. The humorous reasoning of the second, too, is more like Poe's criticism of Cooper's Wyandotte than anything else save Poe's own work found anywhere in the history of Southern criticism. Unconsciously in his critical comments Lanier was an imitator of Poe. Of Whitman he spoke like Poe at his harshest; of Swinburne like Poe at his happiest.

p.XXXVIII. "Swinburne invited me to eat; the service was silver and gold, but no food therein save pepper and salt." The depth of appreciation here is equal to Poe's comparison of Mrs. Browning and Tennyson.

p.XXXV. Lanier himself said that "the trouble with Poe was, he did not know enough. He needed to know a good many more things in order to be a great poet." And in conclusion we should say of Lanier, to use his own words in part, he needed to do a

good many more things in order to be a great critic. His ideas as far as they went were good and worthy, but he did not work them out to win distinction for himself through them. In the Developement of the English Novel he emphasizes the importance of Personality, an idea original with himself. But while the essays are interesting and the thought a new one, it seems not to be given importance enough to convince the reader of their being of lasting value.

p.370. Mr.Moses, however, says Lanier could not be accused of a lack of thoroughness;"the only drawback to his entire poise as a critic was the very natural fact that as a musician, he showed certain tastes which were not founded on analysis, but on preference." This method of estimation, <sup>too,</sup> based upon preference is suggestive of Poe, but Lanier did not use it often.

p.383. In most of his work he appears as scientific investigator, whose modernness brings him down to the present day. This Alive-ness which makes him the first singer of the New South, distinguishes him from Hayne and Timrod, both representative of the old regime.

Henry Timrod also gave expression frankly to his theory of the poetic art. In his Rationale of Poetry he criticised the narrowness of Poe's theory, stating that there could be no stereotyped forms of poetry. His own poetical works, however, are not in any way an advancement over Poe's. Rather they are a retrogression.

In the work of one or two poets, too, is seen the in-

fluence of Poe's theory of verse as well as his own working out of that theory. Like Poe Henry L. Flash sometimes portrayed scenes that were "out of space, out of time". Besides the theme the line, the rythm, and the producing of effect by repitition is all suggestive of Poe. A few verses of Lifting the Veil will indicate the similarity:

Pioneers of            "I am lying in my shroud.  
Southern                Dead -  
Literature,             So they say;  
Vol.II,p.444.           And they pray  
                          Round my bed -

- - - - -

She looks pure and sweet and holy,  
As the moon up in the sky,  
But her heart is cold as marble  
And her locks are all a lie;  
And this woman that I worshipped,  
Is an animated lie."

The irregular line, the swinging rythm, and the effect of unnaturalness of the whole are all Poe-like, suggesting at once the Raven, the Bells, and Annabel Lee.

Henry M. Clarkson's The Death of a Maiden is in tone and phrase again very much in the style of Poe. The first two lines

"Thro' a forest sere and sober

In the golden-clad October, - - - - ."

were surely done after the author had read Ulalume. Mr. Clark-

son must have got the idea of the necessity of totality of interest from <sup>the</sup> Poetic Principle. Thus the whole poem was influenced by the earlier poet's work.

Especially significant of the condition of criticism in the South is the fact that Montrose J. Moses in his new book, the Literature of the South, published in September, 1910, gives no space at all to a discussion of criticism as such. In the literature as a whole he says the art value is in no way to be compared with the life value. His treatment of the whole topic would indicate as he himself says that the Southerner as a type is very much greater than the Southerner as a literary artist. His work seems to be a history of the people as much as it does a history of their literature. Yet of the novelists and the poets he speaks at some length. The critics seem to him, however, not a class worthy of receiving mention. Yet of the individual work of the two most important ones in the critical field he speaks appreciatively in his accounts of their lives; and these two most important ones are as have been pointed out in this discussion, Poe and Lanier.

In conclusion then of this review of Poe's Place in Southern Criticism, I would say that Poe stands first because of the quality of his work and because of the influence it has had. In point of time if <sup>in</sup> no other way he would deserve the title of first critic, for he was literally the first in the Southern field to make a profession of criticism. When



Poe began to write, Longfellow in the North was gently praising and at the same time trying to instruct. In the South a number of magazines were being founded; reviews were becoming the fashion, and in this work Poe was soon engaged. From the time his name was known to the reading public, he was connected with criticism, first as one whose works demanded criticism, and later as a critic himself. Though as an impressionist he was given to pointing out faults to a degree that was often all but absurd, and though his style was often unduly biting, Poe did an excellent work for Southern literature in ridding it of many of the worthless figures who pretended to call themselves authors. Naturally a period of unproductiveness followed such a thinning out but it was better so than that "false and feeble things should continue!"

Poe's theories, especially of poetry and of the short story, won him great distinction, which has proved in the end favorable. To the world's best critics today he stands out as the one original American author; principally, too, is this rank given him because of his theories, and his consistent working out of them.

As a Southern critic Poe has had a greater influence than any of his successors, - As has been said he had no predecessors. Because of his daring application of his theories after he evolved them, and because of the boldly enthusiastic way he has insisted upon them, he surpasses in the worth of his work his chief successor, Lanier.



Other than Lanier no one of very great note has come into the field. There were others who were influenced enough by Poe to become imitators in a small degree, but none that are worthy of mention here. Greater than his train of followers is his train of admirers. And as one of these I would say again in final estimation that because of the quality of his work and because of the influence it has exercised Poe holds first place in Southern criticism.

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